

COMMISSION ON CHILDREN'S JUSTICE
MARCH 31, 2003
MEETING MINUTES

Members Present: Judges John Holstein, Chair, Susan Block, Thomas Frawley, Glenn Norton, Vice Chair, Nancy Rahmeyer, Roy Richter, and James Welsh; Commissioner John Payne; Senators Pat Dougherty and Anita Yeckel (for Peter Kinder); Representatives Catherine Hanaway, Bryan Stevenson, Yvonne Wilson; Julie Cole-Agee, Mary Taylor (for Beth Dessem), Deanna Gallagher, Patrick Lynn, Frank Martin, Steve Renne, Melanie Scheetz, Betty Sims, and Andrea Whitfield

Members Not Present: Senator Bill Foster

Commission Staff Present: Gary Waint, Shawn McCarver, and Lynette Ricks

I. CALL TO ORDER/APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Commission on Children's Justice was called to order by the Honorable John C. Holstein, Chair, in the Division II Courtroom, Missouri Supreme Court, Jefferson City, Missouri at 10:00 a.m.

A copy of a draft of the Interim Report of the Commission was distributed to the members.

The Chair called for approval of the minutes from the meeting of March 17, 2003. The minutes were approved as submitted.

II. OPEN HEARINGS

Judge Andrew Jackson Higgins, Missouri Supreme Court, Retired, made a presentation to the Commission concerning open hearings and records in Missouri juvenile abuse/neglect cases.

Judge Higgins reviewed the legislative history related to procedure concerning open hearings and records. The policy of Missouri is the "best interests of the child," and he urged the Commission to be cautious and selective prior to changing the existing policies and laws related to confidentiality of hearings and records.

Judge Higgins pointed out that the current statutes presently provide procedures for opening hearings and making public certain records.

Judge Higgins urged the Commission to make no change to existing laws related to opening hearings or availability of records.

III. MISSOURI CHILD WELFARE BEST PRACTICE

Sara Barwinski made a presentation to the Commission concerning the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children program. This program began in four cities in the United States including St. Louis, Missouri.

After implementation, St. Louis has seen a reduction of 853 children in foster care, while, during the same period (2001 – 2003), the state as a whole has seen a reduction of only 127 children in foster care. Taking St. Louis out of the picture, the state as a whole saw an increase during the same period.

The program has four key components that must be implemented together. They are: (1) individualized course of action, (2) neighborhood network of available resources, (3) culture change among child protective service workers and (4) capable local leadership and decision making.

This program has now been introduced and is now in the process of implementation in eight additional Missouri counties. Ms. Barwinski recommends adoption of this program across Missouri.

IV. FOSTER CARE/CHILD ASSESSMENT

Professor Jeff Wherry, speaking on behalf of the University of Missouri – St. Louis Children's Advocacy Center of Greater St. Louis, told the Commission of the staggering cost of child abuse and neglect.

Short term solutions include systematic screening of parents and children using specific scientific instruments designed to give valid indicators of child abuse and neglect.

Long term solutions include licensing and certification including training and certification of professionals in the system.

V. INTERIM REPORT

The Commission agreed to change the title on Page 13 to "Work Group Recommendations Under Consideration by the Commission."

The Commission adjourned into work groups to discuss the Interim Report.

The Commission then reconvened at which time each work group reported on changes to the Recommendations Section of the Interim Report.

Judge Holstein announced that the Interim Report as amended by the work groups would be circulated to the members via e-mail. The Chair requested the Commission to respond with a "yes" or "no" vote indicating approval of the Interim Report to Commission staff by Friday, April 4, 2003.

VI. ADDITIONAL MATTERS/ADJOURNMENT

Speaker Hanaway reminded members that the House Children and Family Committee will hold a hearing on House Bill 679 on April 1, 2003.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

The next meeting of the Commission will be April 14, 2003, at 10:00 a.m. in the Division II Courtroom of the Missouri Supreme Court.

Additional meetings will be held in the same location on April 28, 2003 and May 12, 2003.